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ABSTRACT

This journal issue highlights a style of U.S. art and literature generally referred to as regionalism and focuses on Iowa's historical role in its development. Compiled to encourage student understanding about how people lived in the Midwest during the 1920s and 1930s, the depression years are featured through presentations; the study of the painting, "American Gothic," and related literature of that period. Historical events are outlined to help students understand and appreciate the impact of regionalist art. Suggestions for interpreting paintings and constructing dioramas of the time period are provided. Articles are included which detail the life of Iowa's regionalist artist Grant Wood and the importance of the Stone City Art Colony in the historical development of New Deal Art Programs. (JHP)

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The Goldfinch

Iowa History for Young People
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The Goldfinch

Iowa History for Young People

Volume 8, Number 4
April 1987

Editor: Deborah Gore

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Meet Wild Rosie, your official "Goldfinch Tour Guide" for a trip into Iowa's past. This map shows some places we'll visit in this issue.

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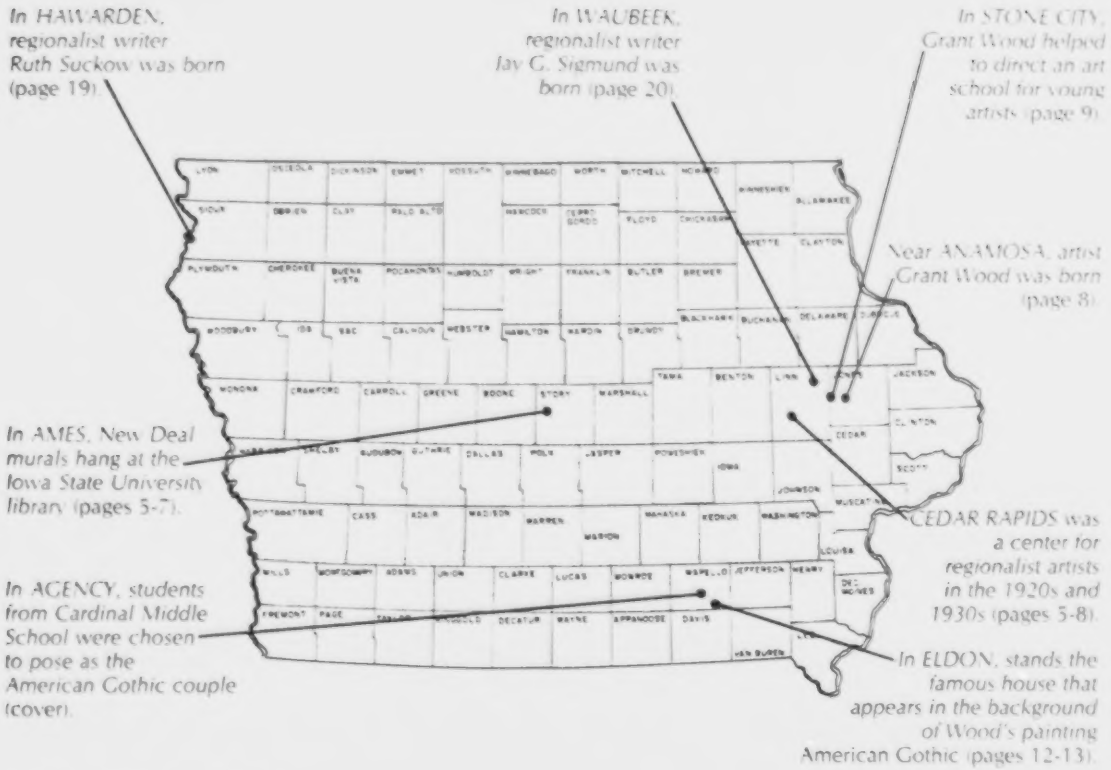
ON THE COVER: *Linda Lanman and Chris Sickle of Cardinal Middle School in Agency, Iowa, pose as the couple in Grant Wood's painting* American Gothic. *Photo by Marc Morton.*


In HAWARDEN, regionalist writer Ruth Suckow was born (page 19).
In WAUBEEK, regionalist writer Jay G. Sigmund was born (page 20).
In STONE CITY, Grant Wood helped to direct an art school for young artists (page 9).
Near ANAMOSA, artist Grant Wood was born (page 8).
In AMES, New Deal murals hang at the Iowa State University library (pages 5-7).
CEDAR RAPIDS was a center for regionalist artists in the 1920s and 1930s (pages 5-8).
In AGENCY, students from Cardinal Middle School were chosen to pose as the American Gothic couple (cover).
In ELDON, stands the famous house that appears in the background of Wood's painting American Gothic (pages 12-13).

ASK WILD ROSIE

"Rosie, what was the New Deal?"
"In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced a government plan to help end the Depression. Federal funds helped to create jobs, feed the homeless and hungry, extend credit to farmers, and make work for artists, writers, and photographers."

"Rosie, Grant Wood's painting *American Gothic* (1930) has been called a national icon (eye-con). What is an icon?"
"An icon is a symbolic picture or image. Some people view *American Gothic* as an important symbol that reflects national values, worries, or hopes."

Regionalism

Marc Morton

The Goldfinch *went to Eldon, Iowa, where the original house that appears in the background of Grant Wood's most famous painting,* American Gothic *(1930) still stands. Linda Lanman and Chris Sickle of Cardinal Middle School in nearby Agency pose as the couple.*

THE TWO KIDS on the cover of this *Goldfinch* are posing as subjects of a painting. The real painting *(see page 6)* is one of the most famous American paintings in history. *American Gothic*, painted by Iowan Grant Wood in 1930, is a painting showing an older small-town man and his daughter. Actually, Wood's sister and his dentist posed for the painting. You may have seen it before in its original form or as a **caricature** (distorted representation) on posters, magazine covers, cereal boxes, or even puzzles.

American Gothic represents a style of art called **regionalism**. This style gained national attention in the 1920s and 1930s. It focused on painting the natural landscape and people of the Midwest; in Wood's case—Iowa scenes and folks.

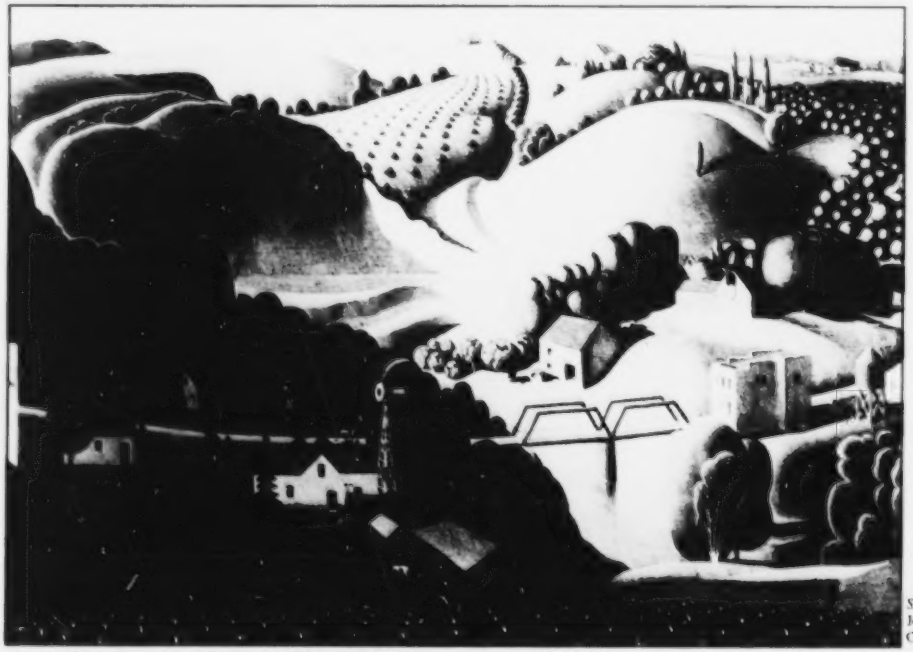
Country Figures

Just as in art, midwestern **regionalist literature** (essays, short stories, and novels) used midwestern people and settings as subjects. Iowa authors Ruth Suckow and Jay G. Sigmund both published works about the people and land they loved in Iowa.

Iowa, in essence, became a center for both regionalist art and literature during the 1930s. Some people believe that these artistic works gave messages of hope and inspiration during the hard times of the Great Depression (1929-1933).

In this issue of the *Goldfinch*, you will learn more about the historical background of regionalist art and literature. We have a guide to help you interpret and understand art. You can practice by studying *American Gothic*. A short story by Ruth Suckow and a poem by Jay G. Sigmund are examples of regionalist literature for you to read and discuss. You can even build a replica of the American Gothic house that appears in the background (of the *Goldfinch* cover and the original painting) of *American Gothic*. By learning more about the art and literature of a historical period, we may be able to better understand how people lived. □

The Regionalist View



Stone City (1930) Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska

Grant Wood's painting Stone City *(1930) shows a peaceful Iowa scene with its crystal-clear view of clean fields, tidy farms, and puff-ball trees.*

"Gradually as I searched, I began to realize that there was real decoration in the rickrack braid on the aprons of the farmers' wives, in calico patterns and in lace curtains. . . . And so, to my great joy, I discovered that in the very commonplace, in my native surroundings, were decorative adventures. . . ."

In 1932, Grant Wood wrote about what he valued as important subjects in his painting: the people and scenery of Iowa. With fellow midwestern painters John Steuart Curry of Kansas and Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, Wood created a style of painting in the 1920s and 1930s that focused on midwestern people and landscapes. This **school of art** (common style of painting) was called **regionalism**. These regionalist artists did not paint scenes of American city

life. Nor did they imitate the current modern styles of European **abstract** (non-realistic) art.

Anywhere But Iowa

Ever since colonial days, many American artists have traveled to European cities to learn new styles of painting. Once they received a European education, many artists often settled in the eastern United States to work.

America's first museums and art schools were built in eastern cities such as Washington, D.C. and New York City. Prior to 1920, it was commonly assumed that both artists and writers had to go East, usually to New York City, to find interesting subjects and to get a national reputation. Many early twentieth century works of art showed the richness of American life by depicting city crowds and skyscrapers.

After World War I, a new interest in art sprang up outside of the glittering eastern cities. Works of art began to appear in new local, state, and regional museums.

Celebrating Life on the Land

Regionalist artists, such as Wood, believed that different geographic regions of the country had their own unique ways of life and thinking. Painters from these regions could "interpret" the ways of life in such areas.

Wood borrowed many ideas about regionalist art from midwestern writers like Ruth Suckow and Jay G. Sigmund and from southern authors. They believed in writing about the traditional image of the United States as an **agrarian** (related to the land) society—not an industrial, urban one. From this regionalist view, writers and artists felt it was important to write about and draw materials

The real-life characters that posed for American Gothic *were Grant Wood's sister, Nan, and his dentist, Dr. B.H. McKeeby of Cedar Rapids.*

from their own experience and life. To these regionalists beauty was not seen as exotic people or urban environments. They appreciated the beauty of ordinary folks and everyday scenes. Benton's works showed oil-drilling people. Curry's painting's depicted rural churchgoers. Wood's paintings of farmers, small-town folks, and Iowa landscapes portrayed agrarian life as a successful, independent way of life.

Wood received national acclaim in 1930, when his painting *American Gothic* won the $300 first prize at the Art Institute of Chicago's contest for

American painters. It showed a small-town midwestern man with his unmarried daughter. In *American Gothic*, some people saw a mood of despair; others saw hope and strength. The painting became a national **icon** (symbol) of life in rural America.

American Gothic's success launched Wood and regionalist art into the spotlight. During his national lecture tours, Wood publicized regionalist art. In 1932, he helped to start an art colony to help train young midwestern artists *(see page 9)*.

New Deal Art Programs

To understand the impact of regionalist art, it is important to know about the historical period in which it flourished.

During the 1920s, business was booming in U.S. cities, while an economic depression was spreading throughout rural America. Farm prices dropped, land decreased in value, and many Iowa farmers lost their farms.

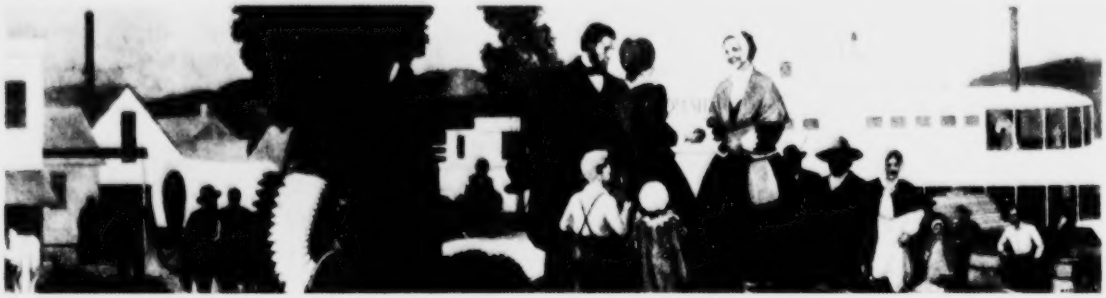
Hard times and widespread unemployment affected the entire nation after the stock market crash of 1929. As the economy worsened, the 1930s also brought severe weather to the Midwest. Drought-stricken Iowa looked nothing like the charming, rolling scenes of a Wood painting.

So why were Wood and other regionalist artists depicting such a rosy view of rural life? Some people believed that this art gave reassurance to America. Others saw paintings like *Stone City* (1932) showing a positive, agrarian lifestyle.

Artists received hope and support from a new patron of the arts: the federal government. In the early 1930s President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs were the first wide-scale support of the arts. The federal Public Works of Art Projects was one such program that paid for 50 murals to be painted in Iowa. Under the direction of Wood, the program helped to train young artists and bring regionalist art to the public.

Despite government help, regionalist art fell to disfavor. Many art critics said that it was was too narrowly focused on midwestern life. With the outbreak of World War II in 1939, attention waned from the regionalist view to focus on more international schools of art. □

Arrival of the First Teacher *shows the 1857 arrival of Mary Wilkins on the steamboat Omaha to take charge of Sioux City's first school. The mural was painted by Herman O. Myre as part of the Public Works of Art Project in Iowa under the direction of Grant Wood.*



Iowa's Grant Wood

Joan Liffring-Zug

As an art instructor in Cedar Rapids, Grant Wood had his ninth-grade students use their imaginations to create a 150-foot-long mural called Imagination Isles.

AS AN ART instructor at McKinley Junior High School in Cedar Rapids, Grant Wood had 45 ninth-grade boys work on a 150-foot-long mural for the school cafeteria. Each boy decorated a few feet of the mural dubbed "Imagination Isles." When it was presented to the school in 1922, Wood talked about the importance of using creativity in art. As an example, he pointed to the cafeteria vegetables. Imagine potatoes as "the succulent seed-vessels of the magical mingo tree!" he told students. See boiled cabbage transformed into the "crisp and tender leaf of the Clishy-Clashy vine!"

It was this creativity that was part of Grant Wood's art. Even as an elementary school student, he won a national crayola contest for drawing. The painting on page 20 was done by Wood when he was about 10 or 12 years old.

Growing Up in Iowa

Wood was born on a farm near Anamosa in 1891. After graduating from Washington High School in Cedar Rapids, Wood studied art in Minneapolis, at the University of Iowa, and at the Chicago Art Institute. During the 1920s, he went to Europe to study painting.

Wood painted for more than 20 years before American Gothic brought him fame at age 39. His early works of art were mostly tree-filled landscapes, backyard scenes, and street views of European cities. Traveling through Europe gave him a deeper appreciation of the Midwest. "I regret the years I spent searching for tumble-down houses that looked 'Europy,'" said Wood. "I know that our cardboardy frame houses on Iowa farms have a distinct American quality and are very paintable."

Wood settled in Cedar Rapids to paint. During the summers of 1932 and 1933, he taught at the Stone City Colony and Art School that he co-founded and helped to direct (*see page 9*).

In 1934, Wood was named director of the Public Works of Art Project in Iowa. Working in an old swimming pool in Iowa City, Wood directed young artists in painting murals for the Iowa State University library in Ames. He also taught at the University of Iowa and went on lecture tours.

Continuing to paint his regionalist art, Wood wrote in 1935: "Occasionally, I have been accused of being a flag-waver for my own part of the country. I do believe in the Middle West—in its people and in its art, and in the future of both. . . ."

Seven years later, Iowa's greatest artist died. But he left us with the images of the Iowa scenes and people he loved. □

Stone City Art Colony

by Debra Luhring

Stone City, Iowa, sheltered in a wooded valley formed by the Wapsipinicon River, once thrived as a quarry town. Located about 26 miles north of Cedar Rapids, Stone City was named in 1873 by John A. Green, an Irish immigrant who had come to quarry limestone there. Green built a 20-room mansion overlooking Stone City in 1883.

The town prospered and by the turn of the century, 1000 people lived there. However by 1920, the introduction of a new type of cement hurt the limestone business. It was the end of the quarry era. But it was the beginning of another—the Stone City Colony and Art School.

In 1932, the country was in the midst of the Depression and there was no financial backing for the colony, but Grant Wood and Adrian J. Dornbush, a painting instructor, were convinced the time was right to set up the colony.

Rural Landscapes

Students came from all over the Midwest to stay for a week or for the entire six-week term. They converted the old Green mansion into the school and dormitory. Wood wanted to show the young artists that it was possible to make art in the Midwest. He expected them to paint what they could see—rural landscapes and country figures.

The art colony was open every Sunday so the public could view artwork. After paying the ten-cent admission fee, visitors (sometimes over 1000) could enjoy a soft drink or sandwich. They also had the opportunity to mingle with the artists themselves.

The Stone City Colony and Art School gained national attention for its work. Wood explained

John Barry

Students paint at the Stone City Colony and Art School. Teaching the class are Iowa artists Marvin Cone (standing left) *and Adrian Dornbush* (center).

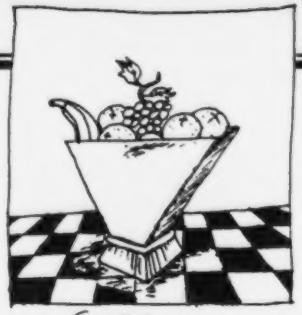
that the painters in the Midwest were creating a new, truly American style of painting. They took on American themes which attracted wide audiences. Because they used familiar subjects and presented them in **literal** (realistic, not abstract) form, they were successful.

Wood was convinced the art colony at Stone City held the secret to encourage art-making in rural America. Regionalist artists had come together in art centers such as Stone City to strengthen each other's confidence.

In 1934, Wood took his dream of the regional art center from Stone City to Iowa City. This meant the end of the summer colony but the beginning of a new program at the University of Iowa.

Although the art colony era had ended at Stone City, the town itself would always live on in Grant Wood's 1930 painting *Stone City*. □

Interpret a Painting



SHAPE

PATTERNS

COMPOSITION

Illustrations by Kurt Zoske

To interpret a work of art is to "see" the message the artist creates. But first you need to *understand* how to view art. We'll show you a few examples of basic elements in painting that you can look for. By asking questions about art you can see what the painting means.

Shape. What shapes do you see in the painting? Are there more curves or straight lines? Straight, angular lines can create disturbed, unsettling feelings. Curved lines may evoke feelings of peace or calmness. How do the shapes affect each other?

Line. Are the lines thick or thin? Heavy lines can show strength and power, while thin lines may depict weakness. Are the lines horizontal or vertical? Horizontal lines can be comforting. Depending on how you "see" them, vertical lines may create feelings of stability or disturbance. How do the lines draw your attention to the various elements of the painting?

Patterns. Can you find any repeated shapes in the painting? Patterns or repeated shapes can reinforce important parts of the painting.

Light. What parts of the painting are light? What parts are dark? The way an artist uses light can emphasize certain parts of a painting. Light can also create an illusion of depth. Brighter images may appear closer while darker images may seem farther away.

Composition. This is the way the artist puts together the parts of a picture. What takes up most of the space? What are the positions of the people or the objects in relation to each other? What is closest to you? Where are you in relation to the picture? Are you looking down at it? Up at it? Straight at it?

You can interpret art on the next page by looking at Grant Wood's famous painting American Gothic. □

American Gothic (1930)
The Art Intitute of Chicago

As one painter once said "Looking is not as simple as it looks." To "see" and understand a painting is to do more than look at it. Read the article on page 10. Then study the painting above and answer the questions or discuss with your class or parents.

Questions

1. What is your first response to the painting? Have you seen it before? Do you like it? Why or why not?
2. When was it made? By whom?
3. What is the title? Does it provide a clue as to what the painting is about?
4. What is the subject of the painting? What is closest to you? What is in the background?
5. What is the mood of the painting? Look at the expressions on the couple's faces.
6. How does the artist use light?
7. What kinds of lines do you see?
8. What shapes are used in the painting?
9. What patterns do you see? (HINT: Turn the page upside down.)
10. What do you think Grant Wood's message is?

Make a Diorama

by Kay Chambers

You can re-create the famous house in the background of Grant Wood's painting *American Gothic* by making a shoe-box diorama.

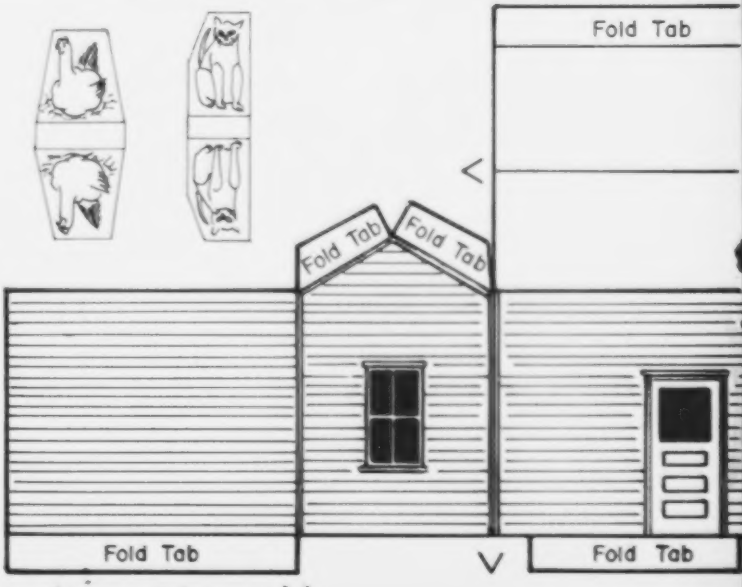
You need:

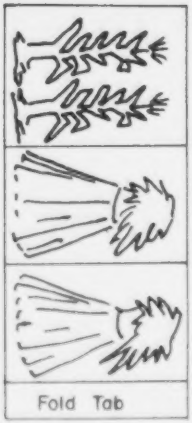
1 shoe box
scissors
glue or tape
2 sheets blue construction paper
1 sheet green construction paper
6 round toothpicks
colored pencils or crayons
(access to a photocopy machine)

Steps:

1. Make a photocopy of the illustrations on these two pages.
2. Cut out the house and porch roof.
3. Fold along lines marked V. One line marked VL must be folded toward you to make the L shape of the house.
4. Glue or tape the roof tabs to the house sides.
5. Fold under porch roof and position it around the house corner. Glue one tab to the front and one to the side of the house so that the top of the porch roof is straight along the dotted lines.
6. With shoe box on its side, glue blue paper to represent sky and green paper to represent grass.
7. Center house against the long side of shoe box. Fold under tabs and glue them to the bottom of the box.
8. Cut and glue toothpicks to the bottom of the box and the porch to make pillars as shown in the photograph.
9. Color the barnyard pieces. Cut, fold, and glue as shown to make stand-up figures. □

The original American Gothic house in Eldon, Iowa.

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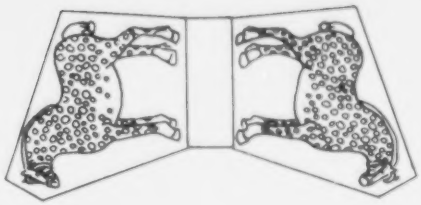

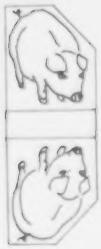

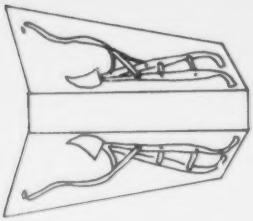

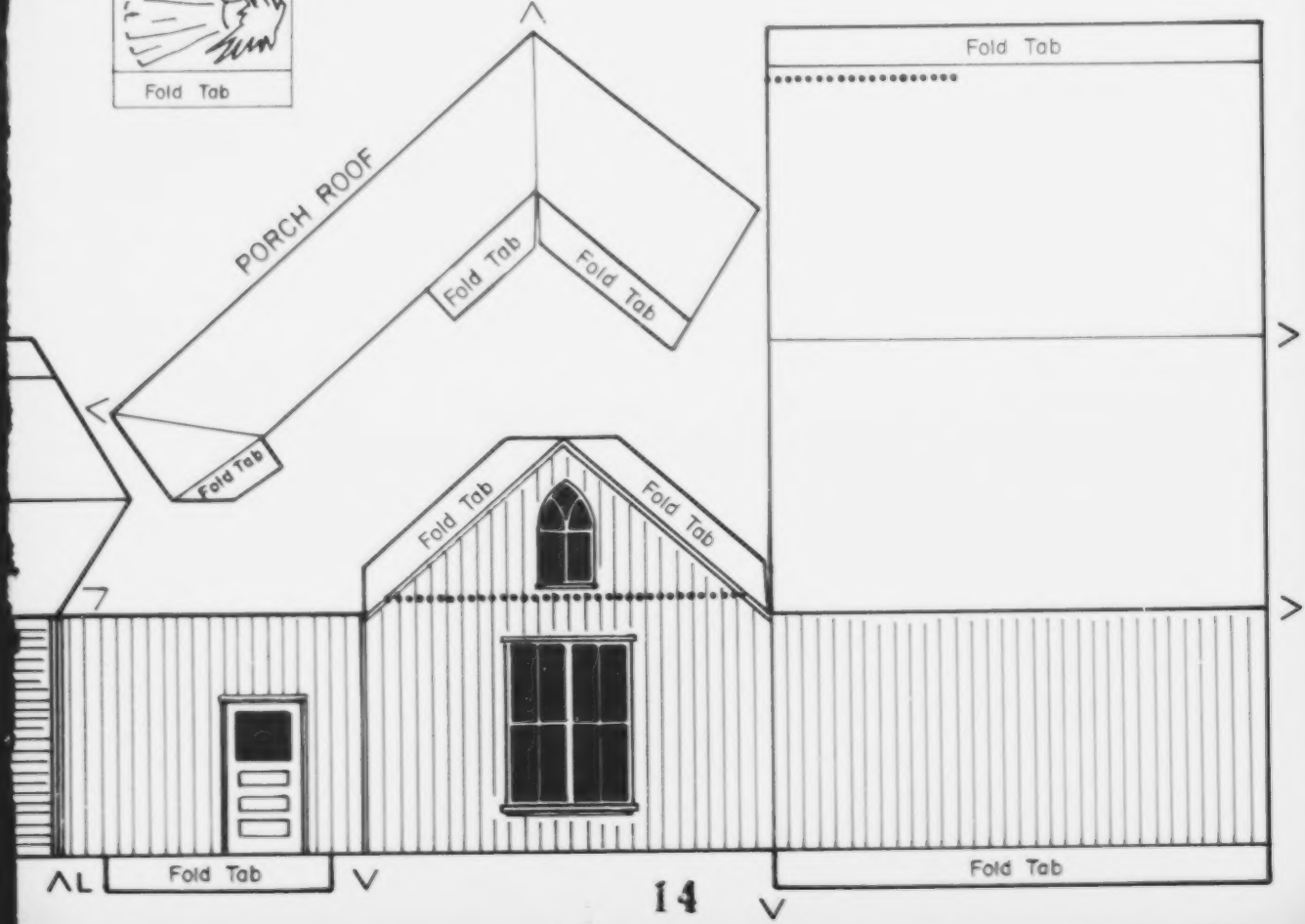
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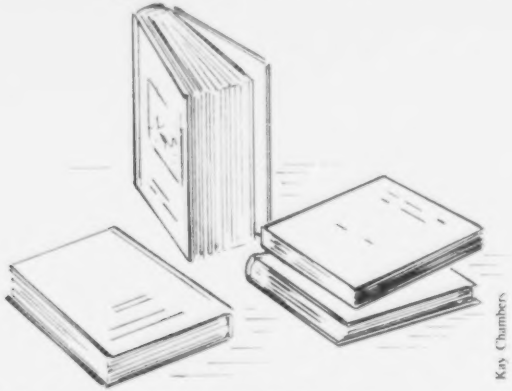
Regionalist Literature



Kay Chambers

"MY OWN DEEPEST interest lies in people and situations rather than settings," wrote Iowa writer Ruth Suckow. Her essays, short stories, and novels are about ordinary folks in the Midwest. "I love the 'poetry of place,'" explained Suckow.

Ruth Suckow first gained national attention with her publication of essays, short stories, and books in the 1920s and 1930s. Another Iowa author, Jay G. Sigmund, wrote poems and short stories about rural farmers, small-town people, and the beauty of Iowa's scenery. As in regionalist art, Iowa was a center for a midwestern literary movement during the Depression years.

Regionalist literature (essays, short stories, and novels) of the 1920s and 1930s had a lot in common with regionalist art. Writers and artists both believed that you did not have to travel to an eastern city to find something interesting to write about.

They found that subjects close to home—midwestern folks—were the best subjects to write about and draw. Many of Suckow's stories were about the family and social relationships of Iowa farmers and small-town people. Wrote one literary critic about Suckow's stories: "They catch the group spirit, the feeling, the atmosphere, of the Middle-Western farms, churches, streets, homes, band concerts, schools. . . ."

Poetry and short stories often focused on the natural landscape of the Midwest. In many earlier published accounts, the Midwest was shown as common and dull. But writers like Suckow and Sigmund recognized and appreciated the beauty of Iowa's landscapes.

An Old Tradition

Regionalist literature was not a new style of writing in the 1920s. In the early nineteenth century, New England authors wrote about the people and culture of the northeast. Southern and western writers also published stories about people in their locales. In the 1890s, writers like Iowa's Hamlin Garland published works about Iowa people.

In the 1920s and 1930s, regionalist literature was becoming popular in many regions of the United States. During the Depression years, New Deal programs paid authors to write state historical guides. Because of a renewed interest in history, many stories were written about midwestern people in earlier periods of history.

To help you understand this type of writing, we have a short story and poem for you to read and interpret. How do you think these works of art are based on Iowa experiences? □

"A Start in Life"

Story by Ruth Suckow
Illustrations by Jenny Wren

Daisy Switzer is about to leave her family to spend the summer with Elmer and Edna Kruse and their two young children. Like many young "hired girls" in Iowa in the early twentieth century, Daisy will earn money by working as a kind of servant. Will the experience be what she expects?

THE SWITZERS were scurrying around to get Daisy ready. . . . They had known all week that Elmer [Kruse] might be in for her any day. But they hadn't done a thing until he appeared. . . .

Mrs. Switzer was trying now at the last moment to get all of Daisy's things into the battered telescope* that lay open on the bed. The bed had not "got made"; and just as soon as Daisy was gone, Mrs. Switzer would have to hurry off to the Woodworths' where she was to wash to-day. Daisy's things were scattered over the dark brown quilt and the rumpled sheet that were dingy and clammy in this damp weather. So was the whole bedroom, with its sloping ceiling and old-fashioned square-pained windows. . . . They all slept in this room—Mrs. Switzer and Dwight in the bed, the two girls in the cot against the wall.

"Mamma, I can't find the belt to that plaid dress."

"Oh, ain't it somewheres around? Well, I guess you'll have to let it go. If I come across it I can send it out to you. Someone'll be going past there."

She had meant to get Daisy all mended and "fixed up" before she went out to the country. But somehow . . . oh, there was always so much to see to when she came home. Gone all day, washing and cleaning for other people; it didn't leave her much time for her own house.

She was late now. The Woodworths liked to have her get the washing out early so that she could do some cleaning too before she left. . . . She would have to get Daisy off first. . . .

"What's become of all your underclothes? They ain't all dirty, are they?"

"They are, too. You didn't wash for us last week, mamma."

"Well, you'll just have to take along what you've got. Maybe there'll be some way of getting the rest to you. . . ."

She jammed what she could into the telescope. . . .

"Daisy, you get yourself ready now."

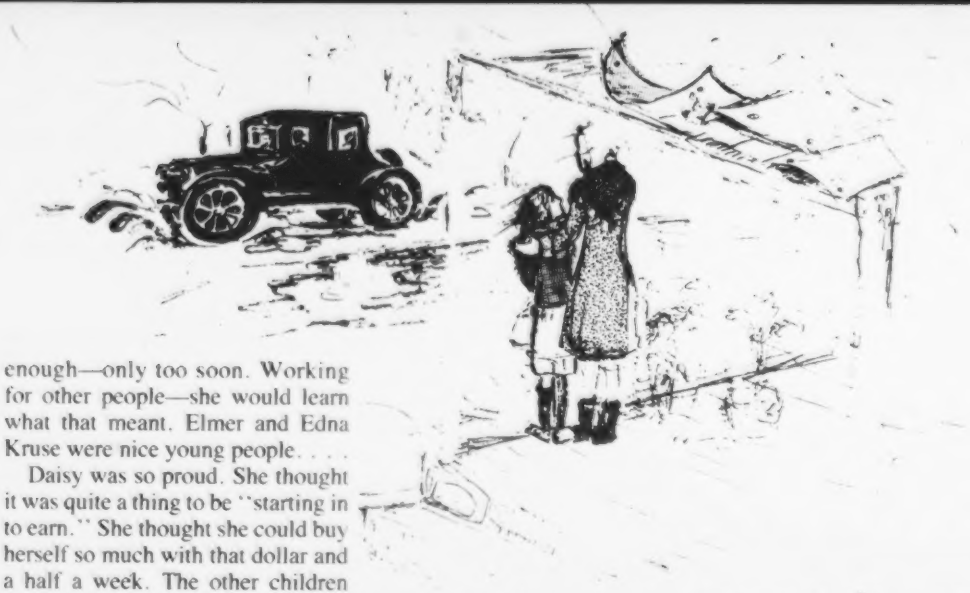
"I am ready. Mamma, I want to put on my other ribbon."

"Oh, that's way down in the telescope somewhere. You needn't be so anxious to fix yourself up. This ain't like going visiting."

Daisy stood at the little mirror preening herself—such a homely child, "all Switzer," skinny, with pale sharp eyes set close together and thin, stringy, reddish hair. . . .

Mrs. Switzer looked at her, troubled, but not knowing how she could tell her all the things she ought to be told. Daisy had never been away before except to go to her Uncle Fred's at Lehigh. She seemed to think that this would be the same. She had so many things to learn. Well, she would find them out soon

*an old suitcase that expands



enough—only too soon. Working for other people—she would learn what that meant. Elmer and Edna Kruse were nice young people. . . .

Daisy was so proud. She thought it was quite a thing to be "starting in to earn." She thought she could buy herself so much with that dollar and a half a week. The other children stood back watching her, round-eyed and impressed. They wished that they were going away, like Daisy. . . .

Elmer's big new Buick, mud-splashed but imposing, stood tilted on the uneven road. Mud was thick on the wheels. . . . Elmer sat in the front seat of the Buick, and in the back was a big box of groceries.

"Got room to sit in there?" he asked. "I didn't get out, it's so muddy here."

"No, don't get out," Mrs. Switzer said hastily. "She can put this right on the floor there in the back. . . ."

He saw the signs of tears on Mrs. Switzer's face, and they made him anxious to get away. She embraced Daisy hastily again. Daisy climbed over the grocery box and scrunched herself into the seat.

"I guess you'll bring her in with you some time when you're coming," Mrs. Switzer hinted.

"Sure. We'll bring her."

He started the engine. It roared, half died down as the wheels of the car spun in the thick wet mud.

In that moment, Daisy had a startled view of home—the small house standing on a rough rise of land, weathered to a dim colour that showed dark streaks from the rain; . . . the chickens, greyish-black, pecking at the wet ground; their playthings, stones, a wagon, some old pail covers littered about. . . . Goldie and Dwight were gazing at her solemnly. She saw her mother's face—a thin, weak, loving face, drawn with neglected weeping, with its reddened eyes and poor teeth . . . in the old coat and heavy shoes and cleaning-cap, her work-worn hand with its big knuckles clutching at her coat. . . .

The car went off, slipping on the wet clay. She waved frantically, suddenly understanding that she was leaving them. They waved at her.

2

Daisy wished she were in the front seat with Elmer. . . . Elmer must have lots of money to buy a car like this. He had a new house on his farm, too, and Mrs. Metzinger had said that it had plumbing. Maybe they would take her to the movies, too. She might hint about that. . . .

Elmer and Edna were just young folks; but Mrs. Metzinger said that they had more to start with than most young farmers did. . . .

"Here we are!"

"Oh, this is where you folks live?" Daisy cried eagerly.

The house stood back from the road . . .—small, modern, painted a bright new white and yellow. The

barn was new too, a big splendid barn of frescoed brick, with a silo of the same. There were no trees. . . .

Edna had come out on the step. Elmer grinned at her as he took out the box of groceries. . . . She said kindly enough:

"Well, you brought Daisy. Hello, Daisy, are you going to stay with us this summer?"

"I guess so," Daisy said importantly. But she suddenly felt a little shy and forlorn as she got out of the car and stood on the bare ground in the chilly wind. . . .

"Look in the door," Edna said in a low fond voice, motioning with her head.

Two little round, blond heads were pressed tightly against the screen door. There was a clamour of "Daddy, daddy!" Elmer grinned with a half bashful pride as he stood with the box of groceries, raising his eyebrows with mock surprise and demanding: "Who's this? What you shoutin' 'daddy' for? You don't think daddy's got anything for you, do you?" He and Edna were going into the kitchen together, until Edna remembered and called [for Daisy to follow into the kitchen.]

Daisy stood, a little left out and solitary, there in the kitchen, as Billy, the older of the babies, climbed frantically over Elmer, demanding candy, and the little one toddled smilingly about. Her eyes took in all of it. She was impressed by the shining blue-and-white linoleum, the range with its nickel and enamel, the bright new woodwork. Edna was laughing and scolding at Elmer and the baby. Billy had made his father produce the candy. Daisy's sharp little eyes looked hungrily at the lemon drops until Edna remembered her.

"Give Daisy a piece of your candy," she said.

He would not go up to Daisy. She had to come forward and take one of the lemon drops herself. . . .

"You can go up with Elmer and take off your things, Daisy," [Edna] said. "[Then] you can . . . come down and help me in the kitchen. You know we got you to help me," she reminded.

Daisy, subdued, followed Elmer up the bright new stairs. In the upper hall, two strips of very clean rag rug were laid over the shining yellow of the floor. Elmer put her telescope in one of the bedrooms.

"There you are!"

She heard him go clattering down the stairs. . . . The back door slammed. She hurried to the window in time to see Elmer go striding off toward the barn.

She looked about her room with intense curiosity. . . . She had a bed all of her own—a small, old-fashioned bed . . . in this room that had the pipes and the hot-water tank. . . . She put her coat and hat on the bed. . . .

She guessed she would go down where the rest of them were.

3

Elmer came into the house for dinner. He brought in a cold, muddy, outdoor breath with him. The range was going, but the bright little kitchen seemed chilly. . . .

"Now, Elmer's come in to dinner, Daisy, we'll have to hurry," [said Edna.] "You must help me get on the dinner. You can cut bread and get things on the table. You must help, you know. That's what you are supposed to do."

Daisy looked startled, a little scared and resentful. "Well, I don't know where you keep your bread."

"Don't you remember where I told you to put it this morning? Right over in the cabinet, in that big box. You must watch, Daisy, and learn where things are. . . ."

[Daisy] sensed something different in the atmosphere than she had ever known before—some queer difference between the position of herself and of the two babies, a faint notion of what mamma had meant when she had said that this would not be visiting.

"I guess I'm going to have a toothache again," she said faintly.

No one seemed to hear her.

Edna whisked off the potatoes, drained the water. . . . "You might bring me a dish, Daisy." Daisy searched a long time while Edna turned impatiently and pointed.

Daisy stood hesitating in the middle of the room, a scrawny, unappealing little figure. Billy—fat, blond, in funny, dark blue union-alls—was trotting busily about the kitchen. Daisy swooped down upon him and tried to bring him to the table. He set up a howl. Edna turned, looked astonished, severe. . . .

Edna said in a cool, held-in voice, "Put these things on the table, Daisy."

They sat down. Daisy's. . . . pinched little face had a hungry look as she stared at the potatoes and fried ham and pie. But they did not watch and urge her to have more. . . . She remembered what her mother had said, with now a faint comprehension: "You must remember you're out working for other folks, and it won't be like it is at home."

After dinner, Edna said: "Now you can wash the dishes, Daisy."

She went into the next room with the children. Daisy . . . could hear Edna's low contented humming as she sat in there rocking the baby on her lap. The bright kitchen was empty and lonely now. . . .

She finished as soon as she could, and went into the dining room, where Edna was sewing on the baby's rompers. Edna went on sewing. Daisy sat down. . . . That queer low ache went all through her. She said in a small dismal voice:

"I guess I got the toothache again."

Edna bit off a thread.

"I had it awful hard a while ago. Mamma come pretty near taking me to the dentist."

"That's too bad," Edna murmured politely. But she offered no other condolence. She gave a secret little smile at the baby asleep on a blanket. . . .

"Is Elmer going to drive into town to-morrow?"

"To-morrow? I don't suppose so."

"Mamma couldn't find the belt of my plaid dress and I thought if he was, maybe I could go along and get it. I'd like to have it."

Daisy's homely mouth drooped in the corners. Her toothache did not seem to matter to anyone. Edna did not seem to want to see that anything was wrong with her. She had expected Edna to be concerned. . . .

[*Edna tells Daisy to play blocks with Billy. He ends up crying and Edna instructs Daisy to put away the blocks and sweep the floor.*]

She winked back tears as she swept, poorly and carelessly.

Then she brightened up as Elmer came tramping up on the back porch and then through the kitchen.

"Edna!"

"She's in there," Daisy offered.

"Want to go now? What! Is the baby asleep?" he asked blankly.

Edna gave him a warning look and the door was closed.

Daisy listened hard. She swept very softly. She could catch only a little of what they said—"Kind of hate to go off . . . I know, but if we once start . . . not a thing all day . . . what we got her for . . ." She hurried and put away the broom. She wanted to be sure and be ready to go. . . .

Elmer honked the horn. A moment later Edna came hurrying downstairs, in her hat and coat, and Billy in a knitted cap and red sweater. . . . The baby had his little coat, too.

Edna said hurriedly: "We're going for a little ride, Daisy. Have you finished the sweeping? Well, then, you can pick up those pieces in the dining-room. We won't be gone so very long. When it's a quarter past five, you start the fire, like I showed you this noon, and slice the potatoes that were left, and the meat. And set the table."

The horn was honked again.

"Yes! Well, we'll be back, Daisy. . . ."

Daisy stood looking after them. Billy clamoured to sit beside his daddy. Edna took the baby from Elmer and put him beside her on the back seat. There was room—half of the big back seat. There wasn't anything, really, to be done at home. That was the worst of it. They just didn't want to take her. They all

belonged together. They didn't want to take anyone else along. She was an outsider. . . .

The engine roared—they had started; slipping on the mud of the drive, then forging straight ahead, around the turn, out of sight.

4

She went forlornly into the dining-room. The light from the windows was dim now in the rainy, late afternoon. The pink pieces from the baby's rompers were scattered over the gay rug. She got down on her hands and knees, slowly picking them up, sniffing a little. She heard the Big Ben clock in the kitchen ticking loudly.

That dreadful ache submerged her. No one would ask about it, no one would try to comfort her. Before, there had always been mamma coming home, anxious, scolding sometimes, but worried over them if they didn't feel right, caring about them. Mamma and Goldie and Dwight cared about her—but she was away out in the country, and they were at home. She didn't want to stay here, where she didn't belong. But mamma had told her that she must begin helping this summer.

Her ugly little mouth contorted into a grimace of weeping. But silent weeping, without any tears; because she already had the cold knowledge that no one would notice or comfort it. □

Reading Activities

Word Check

Write the letter of the correct answer on the line. *(Answers on page 23.)*

___ 1. forlorn	a. lonely; neglected
___ 2. telescope	b. one-piece outfit worn by small children
___ 3. solitary	c. suitcase that expands
___ 4. rompers	d. alone
___ 5. condolence	e. expression of sympathy

What's Your Opinion?

1. What did Daisy's mother do for a job?
2. At the beginning of the story, what did Daisy think her summer would be like at the Kruses?
3. How did Daisy help Edna?
4. Why did Daisy say she was going to get a toothache?
5. What did Daisy learn on her first day of work?

About the Author

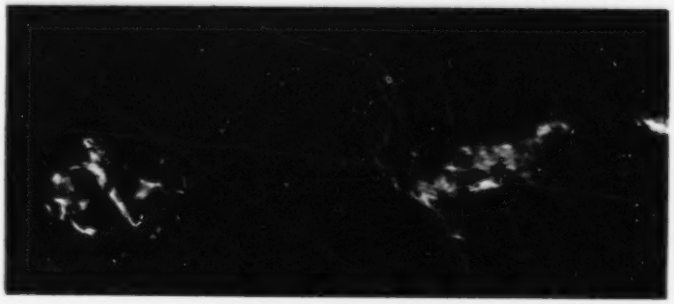
Ruth Suckow's short stories and novels are about ordinary folks in the rural and small town Midwest. Suckow was born in Hawarden, Iowa, in 1892. The daughter of a minister, Suckow frequently moved with her family and she used different towns in Iowa as settings for her stories. Suckow graduated from Grinnell High School and attended Grinnell College. After receiving a master's degree, she wrote automobile guide books for a while. Suckow later wrote more than three dozen short stories. "A Start in Life" was published in her first collection of stories in 1926.

TRACKS

by Jay G. Sigmund (1937)

The tracks I see by the river here
Are deep-etched, dog-like, many and clear,
And a red fox brush has scattered the snow—
He barked at the grouse as he watched it go.
These other tracks saw light of the moon;
The prints of the shy ring-tailed raccoon.
These tracks so wobbly, crazy, drunk,
Were made by my silent neighbor, skunk.
Tiny scribblings by the bittersweet
Are left by a mouse's four white feet.
No, no, that large print sculptured there
Is not the lumbering foot of a bear!
That is the mark my own feet mould
As I wander timberward, bundled from cold.
No brown bears here; no black bear's den;
Only the haunts of wood-loving men
Who venture out like the timber folk
When their hearts are yawning for chunks of oak,
Then back again when the sun drops low
Leaving their tracks like bears' in the snow.

Cat With Fox Rug (c. 1905)
Cedar Rapids Art Center,
Turner Collection



About the Author

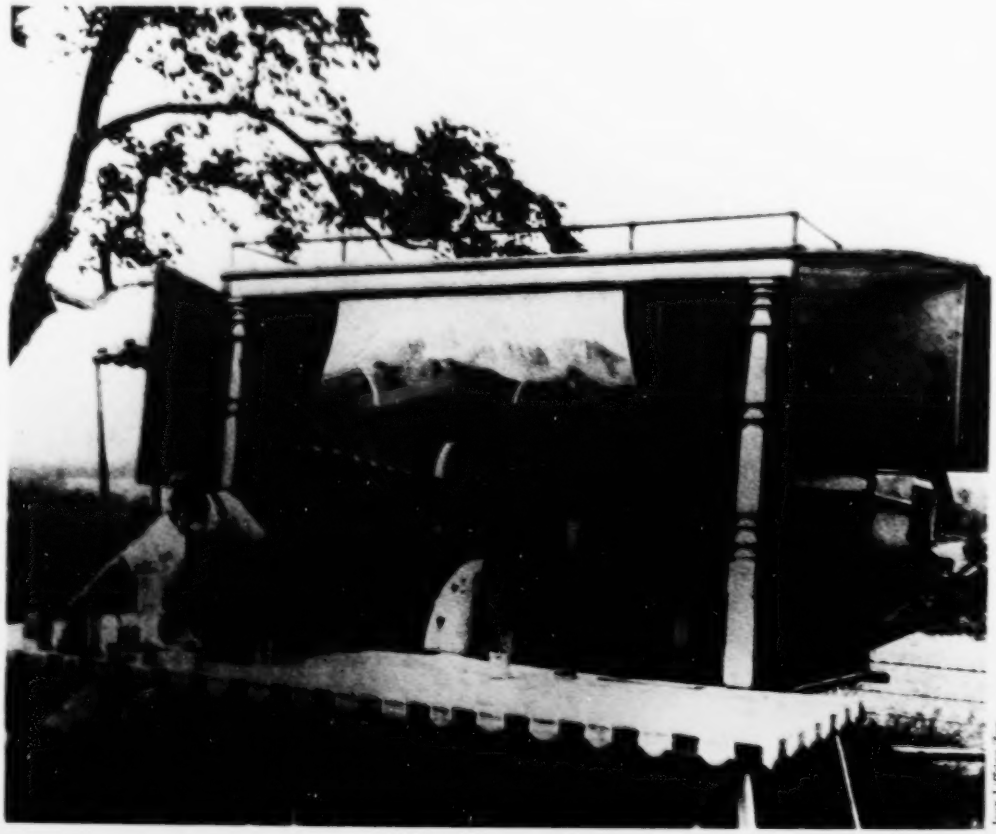
Jay G. Sigmund was born in Waubeek, Iowa, in 1885. He attended Central City schools and when he was 19 years old went to Cedar Rapids to begin a career in insurance. Sigmund spent much of his life exploring the woods around his summer home near the Wapsipinicon River. He wrote poems and short stories about this small area of Iowa that he loved.

What's Your Opinion?

Read the poem and answer these questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. In "Tracks" what animals are mentioned?
2. What season is described?
3. To what are these tracks compared?
4. Why does the author say people go into the woods?
5. How does the author feel about the woods?

History Mystery



Joan Liffring-Zug

CLUES:

1. Fourteen abandoned ones were bought from the Hubbard Ice Company of Cedar Rapids.
2. They were newly roofed and painted.
3. In 1932, Grant Wood (*above*) painted a mountain scene on the one he used.
4. Other artists hung lanterns from hooks that had once been used for drivers' ice tongs.
5. They were used at the Stone City Colony and Art School in the summers of 1932 and 1933.

What are these? What were they used for? (*Answer on page 23.*)

History-Makers

BE A HISTORY-MAKER! The *Goldfinch* is a magazine about the history of Iowa. Wild Rosie wants to know what you've discovered about Iowa's past. Has your class worked on special projects about Iowa history? Are you helping to save something that's old? Have you found an old letter, diary, photograph, or object that tells something about the past? In the next two issues of the *Goldfinch* we'll look at Iowa's constitution and arts and literature. Send your stories, letters, or artwork to the *Goldfinch*, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240. If we can we'll print it in the History-Makers section.

DEAR READERS: Sixth-graders at Cardinal Middle School in Agency, Iowa, wrote essays about the American Gothic house in nearby Eldon. Teachers judged the essays to find two winners to pose for the cover of the *Goldfinch*. Below are excerpts from a few of the finalists' essays.

I really like the Gothic house. It is very special to me. I am very proud of living in the same town as the Gothic house. Everytime I see it I think of the beauty it brings to our town.

—Linda Lanman

I would like to show respect and loyalty to my community and friends. I think the Eldon area doesn't get enough respect. People should recognize Eldon more often.

—Steve Pumphrey

Grant Wood is one of my favorite painters. Every year when they have a Gothic Day parade I always take part in it.

—Darci Jeffrey

I think being on the cover of the *Goldfinch* is in a way like becoming part of the *American Gothic* painting.

—Chris Sickle

We also received poems and art drawn by fifth graders at Cresco Central Complex in Cresco.

Iowa is our home
Our state is nice
We love our state
Agriculture is us.

I love Iowa
Our state is nice
We take pride
And so should you.

Iowa is the best
We won't let you rest
You have to see our sights
Because we don't like to fight
Come on let's run
Let's do all the fun.

—April Stevenson

—Scott A. Voyna

—Brenda Nelson
Grade 6
Meriden (IA)
Elem. School

Winter Air

Winter air is almost gone,
Bringing warmness in,
It makes all of Iowa happier,
A robin makes a grin.

Winter air is out for now
No more cold to be!
Flowers sprouting from the ground,
Growing just for me.

—Dana Robinson
Grade 6
Meriden (IA)
Elem. School

Pass It On

Pass this page on to someone who might share your interest in Iowa history. A teacher or parent, a grandparent or friend? These projects would be fun to do together.

Books to Read

Read more about Grant Wood and his most famous painting in *Grant Wood: American Gothic* by Ernest Goldstein (Champaign, IL: Garrard Publishing Co., 1984) and *This is Grant Wood Country* compiled and edited by Joan Liffring-Zug and John Zug (Davenport Municipal Art Gallery, 1977).

See Regionalist Art!

You can see many works of regionalist artists Grant Wood and Marvin Cone at the Cedar Rapids Art Center. Other works by Wood can be viewed at: the Davenport Municipal Art Gallery, the University of Iowa Museum of Art, Des Moines Art Center, the Charles H. MacNider Museum of Mason City, and the Charles City Public Library. Murals designed by Wood can be seen at the Iowa State University Library in Ames.

Enter a Photography Contest!

Iowa student photographers, grades 6-12, are invited to capture their impressions of the state in the 12th annual Faces of Iowa exhibition sponsored by the Iowa Arts Council. Entries must be postmarked by May 1, 1987. To receive a Faces of Iowa entry form, contact Julie Bailey at the Iowa Arts Council, Capitol Complex, Des Moines, Iowa 50319.

Create Your Own Art

Be a regionalist artist. Capture your feelings about your family, friends, school, town, or state in drawing, painting, or writing. Send copies of your work to History-Makers. We'll publish students' artwork next fall! (Address on page 2.)

Attend a Grant Wood Art Festival!

Visit Stone City for the annual Grant Wood Art Festival the second Sunday of June from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. You can go on a guided bus tour, see arts and crafts, historical exhibits, and strolling entertainers. For more information write: Box 137, Anamosa, IA 52205.

Summer Reading

Learn more about this time in Iowa history in an earlier *Goldfinch* issue: "Hard Times: 1920s and 1930s." Other back issues of the *Goldfinch* are also available for $1.50 each, plus $1.00 postage and handling for 1-10 issues, and $2.00 for 11 or more.

Answers

Discussion Ideas, p. 11: Some people see a pattern of religious symbols in *American Gothic*. The man's shirt might suggest that he is a preacher, the window of the house looks like a church window, and in the background is a church spire. What do you think the pitchfork represents? The pitchfork can also be seen in the man's overalls as well as in the window when you look at the picture turned upside down. Notice the severe expression in their faces, the straight lines, and oval shapes. How does the painting show how Wood feels about rural Americans?

Word Check, p. 19: (1) a; (2) c; (3) d; (4) b; (5) e.

History Mystery, p. 21: These old ice wagons were used at the Stone City Colony and Art School for students to live in during the summers of 1932 and 1933. Most students lived in the Green mansion that served as headquarters for the school. But Grant Wood and some students converted the wagons into tiny sleeping quarters.

Iowa artist Grant Wood poses in his Cedar Rapids studio with his painting Arbor Day *(1932). Later he said, "Suddenly I became aware that my very best ideas of art had come to me while milking a cow in Iowa."*

The **Goldfinch**

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